



AMERICAN CLASSICS



JOHN HARBISON Symphony No. 4

CARL RUGGLES: Sun-Treader

STEVEN STUCKY: Second Concerto for Orchestra

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic

David Alan Miller

Carl Ruggles (1876–1971) • Steven Stucky (1949–2016) • John Harbison (b. 1938)

Orchestral Works

Carl Ruggles: *Sun-Treader*

Born 11 March 1876, Marion, Massachusetts
Died 24 October 1971, Bennington, Vermont

Sun-Treader is one of just ten works that Carl Ruggles completed in his lifetime. And even still, with few other works demanding his attention, Ruggles could not finish this one in time. It was begun in 1926 for a concert to be conducted by Edgard Varèse for the International Composers' Guild. The concert was scheduled to occur that fall, and occur it did, but without Ruggles' piece. *Sun-Treader*, completed in 1931, missed the deadline by nearly five years.

The work takes its title from Robert Browning's 1832 poem *Pauline*, published anonymously by the poet and meant as paean to the great Romantic poet Shelley. The line that caught Ruggles' imagination was "Sun-treader – life and light be thine for ever." The fixation was not on the entire poem, or even its metaphorical meanings, but rather on the image of giant, loping steps evoked by the word "Sun-treader."

Those steps are brought to life in the work's opening measures. Over a beating timpani, the brass stride forward powerfully. The effect is like that at the opening of Brahms' *First Symphony*, but the musical language is wildly different. Ruggles utilized atonal methods that were something in between free composition and strict serialism. He attempted to write melodies such that no note was repeated until a large number (usually between seven and all twelve) had been used. Additionally, he utilized three-note sets to help delineate both melody and harmony in *Sun-Treader*.

The end result is a work that sounds more in line with the wild atonality of Alban Berg than that of Arnold Schoenberg. It can be very dissonant, but it provides for moments that sound almost tonal. Over the course of the one-movement work, Ruggles offsets moments of quiet lyricism with pounding, steady sections akin to the introduction and moments of rapid acceleration. At its heart, *Sun-Treader* is a study in contrasts; one that can reward musicians and audiences alike.

Steven Stucky: *Second Concerto for Orchestra*

Born 7 November 1949, Hutchinson, Kansas
Died 14 February 2016, Ithaca, New York

Steven Stucky's *Second Concerto for Orchestra*, is the culmination of more than three decades of work between the composer and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Lauded after its 2004 premiere during the inaugural season of the orchestra's Walt Disney Concert Hall, the *Second Concerto for Orchestra* was given further recognition when it received the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for music. It seems especially fitting that this should be the work for which Stucky was rewarded, as his only other brush with the competition came when he was named a finalist in 1989 for his *First Concerto for Orchestra*.

But the work that did win the prize is one that is rife with musical puzzles. Stucky created a concordance of letters of the alphabet and musical notes for the concerto. There are obvious analogues (the notes A through G match those letters), and some that are familiar to regular readers of program notes (the German notation system, in which B natural is represented as H, for instance, allowed J.S. Bach to add his name to music with a B flat–A–C–B natural motif that, in German notation, comes out as BACH). Beyond those, Stucky assigned letters based on solfège (do-re-mi...) and then finished out what remained of the alphabet.

The result, confusing as it may be to piece together on paper, is a toolkit that allowed Stucky to pay homage in the concerto to the orchestra and people he had worked with for so long. From his musical alphabet he derives themes such as LAP (Los Angeles Philharmonic), EPS (Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's director at the time of the work's premiere), or GEHRY (Frank Gehry, the architect of the Walt Disney Concert Hall). For listeners who are concerned about trying to comprehend the numerous musical references, Stucky had some advice: "If you assume that something is going to be incomprehensible, it will be. But if you expect to understand it, then you will."

It is, of course, not necessary to hear all of these myriad themes as ciphers to enjoy them as music. The concerto is written in three movements. The first, *Overture (with friends)* makes overt references to the music of Ravel, Stravinsky, and Sibelius, all while including Stucky's witty musical code. This is followed by the theme and variations second movement. Here the theme is first heard in the woodwinds before it is given six variations that alter between slow and fast tempi.

In the finale, a recurring refrain of deep, sonorous brass chords marks the space between what Stucky referred to as "combos," soloists and groups of instruments (such as xylophone with muted trumpets). The end result is Stucky showcasing something of his own passions. "I am devoted to the symphony orchestra as a medium," he wrote, "to its unmatched colors, to its incomparable power, to the unparalleled thrill that you can only get by hearing a hundred brilliant artists together, putting their brains and muscles and spits into a united gesture of human communication."

John Harbison: *Symphony No. 4*

Born 20 December 1938, Orange, New Jersey

John Harbison has been at the forefront of American composition for more than three decades. In 1987 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music for his choral and orchestral work, *The Flight into Egypt*, which takes as its text the King James Bible translation of Matthew 3:13–23. Just two years later, Harbison was one of the 1989 MacArthur Fellows, and a recipient of the "Genius Grant" that accompanies the honor. In addition to these recognitions, he is widely regarded as one of the pre-eminent living American symphonists.

So it is no surprise that for their centennial celebrations in 2004 the Seattle Symphony commissioned Harbison to write what would become his *Fourth Symphony*. The work

is structured in five movements, but they were composed in anything but a linear fashion. Harbison notes that the fourth movement, *Threnody*, was completed before the rest of the piece, and the *Finale* came before the *Scherzo* third movement. As a result, it is possible to hear influences of all of the symphony's movements throughout the entire work.

The introductory *Fanfare* is bombastic. Harbison says that the beginning was driven by his desire to follow "the strongest impulses that present themselves, independently, until they begin to form a large, interdependent design." The brash beginning is answered by more informal, conversational solo instruments.

The second movement, *Intermezzo*, is a stark contrast to the *Fanfare*. Bell-tones, long silences, and breaks provided by long, circuitous string solos shape the sonic environment. The following third movement is not quite as frenetic as is often expected of a symphonic *scherzo*, but the rapid back-and-forth movement between sections of the orchestra brings the wit of the style to the fore.

It is the fourth movement that is the emotional core of the symphony. Harbison composed the *Threnody* while in Italy after receiving a call that brought the sense that "the breath of mortality, bearing at this moment on the person closest to me, came suddenly and radically near." The result is a poignant song of the fear of the end. "This 'Threnody' is not about loss," Harbison writes, "but about the imminence and inevitability of loss at times, we of course, do not choose."

Harbison says that his inspiration for the last movement came from an Emily Dickinson line, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—" The formality is not expressed in terms of the overall structure of the movement, but rather in the manner of writing, which sounds more like a standard symphony than anything else in the entire work.

Robert Lintott

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic

Richard Scerbo, Director

Violin

Patrick Lin, concertmaster
Lauren Pulcifer, principal
Christian Aldridge
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Alicia Barker
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Julian Maddox
Ryan McDonnell
Micca Page
Alexis Shambley
Emma Simmons
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Chase Ward
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Mikela Murphy
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Lyrica Smolenski
Eilish Spear
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Marza Wilks, principal
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Callie Gálvez
Phillip Goist
Aurora Lawrie
Dooeun Lee
Hannah MacLeod
Emily Mantone
Morgan Mitchell
Pecos Singer
Peter Swanson
Zachary Whitaker

Bass

Patrick Dugan, principal
Patrick Fowler
Josephine Jihee Kim
John Shank
Sam Shreves
Neil Walters
Bingwen Yang

Flute

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Allison DeFrancesco*
Alexandria Hoffman
Anne Kim
Lydia Roth

Oboe

Lucian Avalon*
Ben Brogadir
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Shane Werts
Bethany Slater*

Clarinet

Tiberiu Baicoianu
Pablo Davila Barrio
Wonchan Doh
Silvio Guitian
Evan Schnurr*

Bassoon

Joshua Elmore
Joey Lavarias
Christopher Pawlowski
Matthew Wildman

Horn

Spencer Bay
Nathan Goldin
Bailey Myers
Nicolas Perez
Justin Ruleman
Alex Stepans

Trumpet

Wyeth Aleksei
Matthew Beesmer
Kenneth Chauby
Sally Tepper
Michael Terrasi

Trombone

Kevin Carlson
Guangwei Fan
Nicholas Hogg*
Jonathan Kraft*

Bass Trombone

Derek Mitchell

Tenor Tuba

Jordan Moore*

Tuba

Larry Dine

Harp

Caitlin Mehrtens

Percussion

Jieun Chung
Brad Davis
Micah Harrow
Jonathan Milke
Nehemiah Russell

Piano/Celesta

Chris Koelzer
Zsolt Balogh

Orchestra Manager

Julia Perry

* Ruggles only

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic



Photo: Geoff Sheil

The National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center is formed each June from the musicians of the National Orchestral Institute. These musicians of extraordinary talent are chosen through rigorous international auditions and coalesce into one of the most dynamic orchestras in the country. Focused on creating future musicians and leaders in the world of orchestras, its alumni now occupy important positions in virtually every major symphony orchestra in the United States.

More about the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic can be found online at www.noi.umd.edu

David Alan Miller

GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor, David Alan Miller, has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. Music director of the Albany Symphony since 1992, Miller has proven himself to be a creative and compelling orchestra builder and masterful interpreter of American contemporary music. Through commissioning and recording new works for orchestra alongside innovative educational and community outreach initiatives, he has reaffirmed the Albany Symphony's reputation as one of the nation's leading champions of American symphonic music and one of its most cutting-edge orchestras. From 1988 until 1992, David Alan Miller was associate conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic alongside music director André Previn. From 1982 to 1988, he was music director of the New York Youth Symphony, earning considerable acclaim. In 2001, Miller won the ASCAP Morton Gould Award for Innovative Programming, and in 1999, ASCAP's first-ever Leonard Bernstein Award for Outstanding Educational Programming.

**Carl
RUGGLES**
(1876–1971)

1 Sun-Treader (1926–31) 15:25

**Steven
STUCKY**
(1949–2016)

**Second Concerto for Orchestra
(2004) 25:25**

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 2 | I. Overture (with friends) | 4:46 |
| 3 | II. Variations | 13:47 |
| 4 | III. Finale | 6:52 |

**John
HARBISON**
(b. 1938)

Symphony No. 4 (2004) 24:22

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 5 | I. Fanfare | 2:59 |
| 6 | II. Intermezzo | 5:20 |
| 7 | III. Scherzo | 6:24 |
| 8 | IV. Threnody | 4:54 |
| 9 | IV. Finale | 4:33 |

**National Orchestral
Institute Philharmonic**

David Alan Miller

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

This is the third recording in a multi-year partnership between the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic and Naxos to release one album of American music each year. A study in dramatic contrasts, Carl Ruggles' *Sun-Treader* is an overwhelming, granite-hued tone poem by one of New England's most original and uncompromising composers. Steven Stucky's luminous Pulitzer Prize-winning *Second Concerto for Orchestra* is a riveting exploration of sonority and sound-painting while John Harbison's *Fourth Symphony* is a big, bold, jazz-imbued work by one of America's most important living symphonists.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
65:28